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History Line

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To: History Coordinators 1680
Forest Service Personnel August 1, 1971

Issued by the History Branch, Div. of Information and Education, WO, as an informal line of communications among Service employees on the subject of Forest Service history. The Line is open both ways. Questions, comments, short items are welcomed. Room 3034-S Bldg. Phone: (202) 388-2418

Oops! Our goof was showing in the July issue. Unfortunately (for History Line and the Forest Service), Eric Hoffer was never a regular FS employee, but instead, probably did some occasional day labor on bridge crews for R-5 engineer John Lawrence--now deceased, and the man who had quoted a Hoffer column and also referred to having talked at some length with him. Just goes to show that History Line is human and fallible, subject to errors on rare occasions. (More on John Lawrence, who was a distinguished FS engineer in his own right.)

As Winston Churchill once said, we have not always been wrong. Fifty Years of Forestry in the U.S.A. (1950, edited by Dr. Robert K. Winters), also recounts the fact that "the first modern type bulldozer--a caterpillar tractor with an adjustable angle blade in front--was invented by a mechanical engineer, employed by the U.S. Forest Service. Records in the California Region show that in 1929 Earl L. Hall modified the old back-filling tractor by making the blade adjustable as to angle." The account goes on to credit the bulldozer with having been a great tool for fighting forest fires, as well as helping to win World War II.

Myles R. (Mike) Howlett, WO Director of Engineering, tells us that they are still trying to find one of these old hand-made machines built by Earl Hall. The Smithsonian Institution is also interested. Anyone knowing the whereabouts of one of these old machines, please contact us.

The same volume, Fifty Years of Forestry, quotes "Time" magazine (April 2, 1945) as giving a large share of credit to the Forest Service in aiding U.S. Army Airborne activities (Paratroops) in WW II. The quote: "U.S. Airborne activities began in 1940... There was no ready-made body of doctrine or data. In the beginning some of the best information came from the Department of Agriculture's forestry experts who knew something about parachuting men and materials to forest fires."

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The book continues: "To the late David P. Godwin, former chief of the division of fire control of the U.S. Forest Service, goes the full credit for this exceptionally constructive thought and action. Capitalizing on his experience of 1936, 1937, and 1938, in cargo dropping, Dave Godwin supervised approximately 60 'live jumps on the Chelan National Forest in late 1939'..."

There's good news today re Breaking New Ground by Gifford Pinchot. The University of Washington Press is now in the process of bringing out a reprint edition, as part of the new American Library series, in both hardbound and paperbound form. The hardcover edition will be out before the end of this year, and the paperbound version will be out a year later. Each volume in the series will carry a new introduction, but other than this, the text will follow the original. (More later on price and how it can be ordered.)

The first center for forest research in the U.S. was at the homeplace of Gifford Pinchot's father, James Wallace Pinchot, at Milford, Pa. So says the 1907 Yearbook of Agriculture. We quote: "In addition to the Yale School of Forestry, Mr. James W. Pinchot established at Milford, the Milford Forest Experiment Station, the first to be established in the United States, at which experiments to determine the characteristics and uses of native trees are carried on. Although he had traveled widely, Mr. Pinchot never lost interest in the town of Milford, where he was born. The old homestead of the Pinchots has been transformed into a free public library. Forest Hall, a large stone building, has been erected principally for the use of the Yale Summer School of Forestry, and in many other ways the town of Milford has felt the influence of his untiring interest in its welfare."

Through a used book store in Denver, and the good services of Edward Littlehales, we were able to acquire 14 valuable books for our history reference shelf here. They came from Arthur H. Carhart's personal library which he disposed of when he moved from Denver to California. Included are: Politics and Grass by Phillip O. Foss, Plowman's Folly by Edward H. Faulkner, Forests and Man by former Chief William B. Greeley, Muddy Waters by Arthur Mass, Timber by Bryan Latham, Your Forests by Martha Bensley Bruere, Big Hugh by Wellington Brink, Water for Your Life by Arthur H. Carhart, Gifford Pinchot--Forester-Politician by M. Nelson McGeary, Our National Forests by Bernard Frank, The Singing Wilderness by Sigurd Olson, Sawmilling by Ralph W. Andrews, Logging, also by Andrews, Son of the Forest by Arthur Carhart.

History of Timber Management in the California National Forests--1850 to 1937. This valuable, single-spaced typed, 86-page volume, uncovered and brought to the history office by Robert W. Pearl, WO, TM, is the kind of source material for which we need to be constantly on the alert. Written by R.W. Ayres, (1958) Conservation writer and retired forester, it is described on the cover as: "A comprehensive--and at times humorous--history of the development of timber management and the lumber industry in California. R.W. (Bummer) Ayres has treated the subject thoroughly and with honesty which could come only from one who grew up with the timber business in the West and the problems incident in trying to carry out the policies and plans formulated by Washington for the 'farthest cut' of the newly established Forest Reserves." It is possible that there are other such volumes around in somebody's files--of histories of a Region, Station, or Forest that bring the unit history up to a certain year. If you have or know of such, please let the History Office know, so that we may have a record. In any overall history of the Service, or of Regions or other units, such publications could be highly useful and save untold hours of new research.

History Line, up to now, has gone to only a few retirees, those who specifically requested it. Beginning with the next issue, we hope to expand this list to more Forest Service retirees. Arrangements are being worked out. Certainly, this group of people are most interested and avid supporters of Forest Service history. Many of them made much of it and still have much to contribute to its recording and preservation.

To all coordinators, and others who have taken the time to write or call, to send tips on interesting Service history, or otherwise aid the cause: A big thank you! With this kind of interest and support, a full-fledged Forest Service history program can't fail.